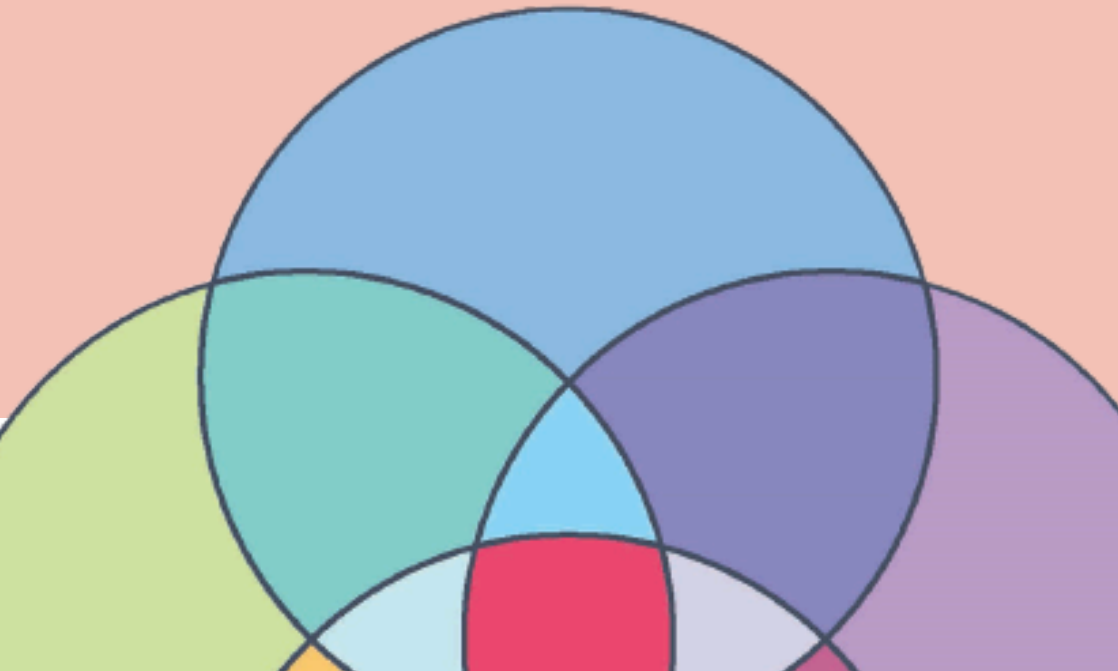


BORDERLANDS
from exclusion to
BELONGING

Impact Report
2023/24





Foreword

It's been a turbulent year for our sector and as we head into winter and the new year approaches it is a good time to reflect on the highs and lows while looking forward to feel the excitement of 'what's next'.

We have seen the Rwanda plan rip through the sector like a tornado, vanishing as quickly as it arrived but leaving untold damage in its wake. We also weathered the riots that saw streams of thugs attack one of the asylum hotels we support and forcing many services across the city to close their doors. Both events took a huge mental toll on our members and our incredible staff and volunteers were there to stand alongside them every step of the way.

Our welcome centre offered a safe space for members to come and feel supported while the mentoring project provided much needed one to one support. Our Learning Project has gone from strength to strength accepting more students than ever before. We are so proud to be able to offer these essential services and to see each of them flourish and grow year after year. As you may know by now, Borderlands likes to look at the positives, keeping our eye on the wins while trying to shake off the losses and we hope to pass this optimism onto our members, so they feel the warmth and welcome of our spaces.

I would like to take a moment to send my heartfelt thanks to all our staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to keep our services running as well as our funders who have faith in our work and continue to support what we do and allowing us to reach those who need it the most.

I hope you enjoy reading this impact report as much as I have enjoyed reflecting on the past year's achievements. Thank you for your time, and as always, we're just an email away!

Caitlin Plunkett, Interim CEO



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Introduction

Walking into the Borderlands Welcome Centre, a group of volunteers are setting up the space, preparing food for the morning's social supermarket and cutting fruit for the breakfast table.

A new member arrives, someone who has not been here before, and rings the bell. Our welcome team greets them with the warmest of smiles. As someone with lived experience of the asylum system, the welcome team member knows the importance of a good welcome. At the welcome desk, the new member is met by a multilingual team of volunteers, all dedicated to ensuring they feel welcomed, even if they don't speak English.

After being offered tea and a seat to wait to register, a staff member shows the new arrival around. "There is a breakfast table you can help yourself to. Upstairs, you'll find an art table, a barber, and an IT suite that you are welcome to access!"

WARMTH

SHARING

When a new member registers, we make sure to understand their needs. This new member reports sleep problems, isolation, and feeling anxious and nervous in their new home. We introduce them to some of the services Borderlands offers, including sleep support sessions, Feel-Good Wednesday activities and refer them to the Mentoring Project.

We also provide them with a joint services leaflet, highlighting our partner organisations and how they can help. The leaflet translated in multiple languages ensures they are aware of all the support available to them in the community. At Borderlands we like to provide members with opportunities and activities that are happening across the city.

At lunchtime, everyone gathers for a hot meal. The new member sits down and begins talking and interacting with others, slowly feeling more at ease and connected.

Our mentoring project offers ongoing one-on-one support, helping new members navigate life in the UK, access essential services, and gain the skills they need to move forward. This gradual process empowers them to become more self-reliant, fostering their ability to fully integrate into their community.

Over time, we support members in building their confidence and independence through tailored services, such as language classes, skills development, and social activities.

This journey, from the warm welcome at the door to the tailored support and opportunities offered, exemplifies Borderlands' commitment to turning exclusion into belonging, providing refugees and asylum seekers with the tools and support they need to build meaningful lives.

Chair's Report

It has been a privilege to be appointed as the new Chair of Trustees, especially following from our previous Chair, and a founder of Borderlands, Richard McKay, and the incredible momentum which he assisted Borderlands in creating. This is a brief summary report for the 2023/2024 year at Borderlands.

Borderlands emerged from many years of work by the people of St Nicholas of Tolentino Church, which focused on welcoming individuals to the area of Bristol and supporting them in becoming settled and active members of the Bristol community. Over the years, Borderlands has continued to expand and redirect its resources to meet the ever-changing needs of our members. This last year, member attendance at our English classes increased threefold, additionally, our Mentoring Project supported members faced with stresses of the Rwanda Bill and our Outreach team supported the increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers placed in hotels in the Bristol area. Our wellness activities assist individuals in prioritising their mental health and wellbeing during these stressful times. The very popular Welcome Centre continues to operate as a core service and welcomes both new and existing members. A highlight is a hot meal eaten and shared with community.

As costs increase, Borderlands is incredibly grateful for the financial support it receives from individuals, churches, community groups, and grant funding organisations. Borderlands also thanks the Lloyds Bank Foundation for providing consultancy in corporate governance for both staff and trustees which benefits the Charity's procedures to ensure constant improvement. Borderlands also works alongside other charities and organisations in the Bristol refugee and asylum seeker community – this facilitates the sharing of good practices and avoids duplicated effort.

I would also like to thank the Borderlands staff, volunteers, and Trustees - it is their motivation and invaluable contribution which ensures the quality of our services to our members. Our Chief Executive, Susanna Revolti was on maternity leave in 2023, and Caitlin Plunket (Operations Manager) stepped in temporarily as Interim Chief Executive. Caitlin did a great job, and we thank her and the team of staff who supported her.

Borderlands aims to prioritise adapting to meet new challenges and I know that the upcoming year will continue to see Borderlands grow and support its members.

Kimberlee Lynn Carstensen, Chair of Borderlands



Our Members

In 2023-24...

63%

of our members
(the people we work with)
were asylum seekers

They came from many different countries including Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

The UK asylum system forces our members into poverty and hardship, which affects their wellbeing and prevents them living a healthy life.

25%

were refugees

Many have experienced traumatic events before arriving in the UK and, in many cases, are re-traumatised by the UK asylum system. They are also increasingly moved to other parts of the country at short notice, making it even more difficult to build connections and community in their new home.

12%

were other vulnerable migrants including refused asylum seekers and survivors of trafficking and modern slavery.

The new Illegal Migration and Rwanda Acts have left our members fearful and uncertain about their future, and we have seen a huge decline in people's mental health. They fear being sent to Rwanda or left in limbo with no status, rights or future.

**Our Welcome Centre
helped 836 asylum
seekers and
refugees to make
connections and
build community in
their new home in
Bristol this year.**



Welcome Centre

Borderlands' Welcome Centre is a safe, trusted hub of support and community for asylum seekers and refugees in Bristol. Located at the Assisi Centre in Easton, our doors are open every Monday and Tuesday, this year we delivered a range of essential services:

Every week, we **provided a nutritious, hot meal** where members came together to enjoy good food and build a sense of community.

We **warmly welcomed** new arrivals and helped them to register as Borderlands members, providing access to our projects and a broader **support network in Bristol**.

Our **social supermarket** gave members the opportunity to take home fresh produce, tins, and other essential groceries.

We provided cooking sessions where members **cooked and shared meals together from their home country**, particularly important for those living in accommodation without kitchen facilities.

An **art table** provided a therapeutic outlet for expression, offering a safe space for members to creatively explore their emotions and alleviate stress and anxiety.

Personalised support services assisted individuals in addressing challenges, advocating on their behalf, and connecting them with relevant resources, including emergency accommodation for those facing destitution.

Collaborations with **partner agencies** brought specialised services into our centre, such as **NHS talking therapies and liver screenings**.

Local excursions introduced members to Bristol's cultural offerings, including **guided walks, museum visits, and an annual seaside trip**.

Our **Eid celebration** at the Trinity Centre **welcomed around 152 attendees** from diverse backgrounds, featuring a delectable lunch, children's activities, and lively music and dancing.



"We enjoy the cooking, we miss our kitchen so much and after so long we cook and we enjoy it and we do it again. Our kids will be so happy to have these dishes!"

-anonymous feedback from a cooking session.

Food Provision

At Borderlands, food remains an integral part of our community-building efforts. Weekly communal meals provide nourishment while fostering social connections and friendships among our members.

Food insecurity is a major issue for our members: asylum seekers struggle to feed their families on very limited financial support, and hotel food is often unhealthy, inappropriate, and insufficient, especially for children.

After careful consideration and consultation, we introduced a needs assessment for our social supermarket this year, ensuring asylum seekers in housing have fair access while still supporting people in hotels. Refugees are given a limited time to use the service, during which we offer tailored support to help them to build independence.

We have also split the 'supermarket' into two rooms to cater for those with and without cooking facilities, which helps to maintain a safe and calm space.

Asylum seekers residing in hotels have no cooking facilities and miss cooking and eating together. A big highlight of the year was the launch of our community cooking groups (14 sessions in total) which enabled families and friends to cook and share food together using our kitchen. The joy and connection during these gatherings was heart-warming; participants experienced a sense of empowerment and belonging, with one likening the experience to "home."



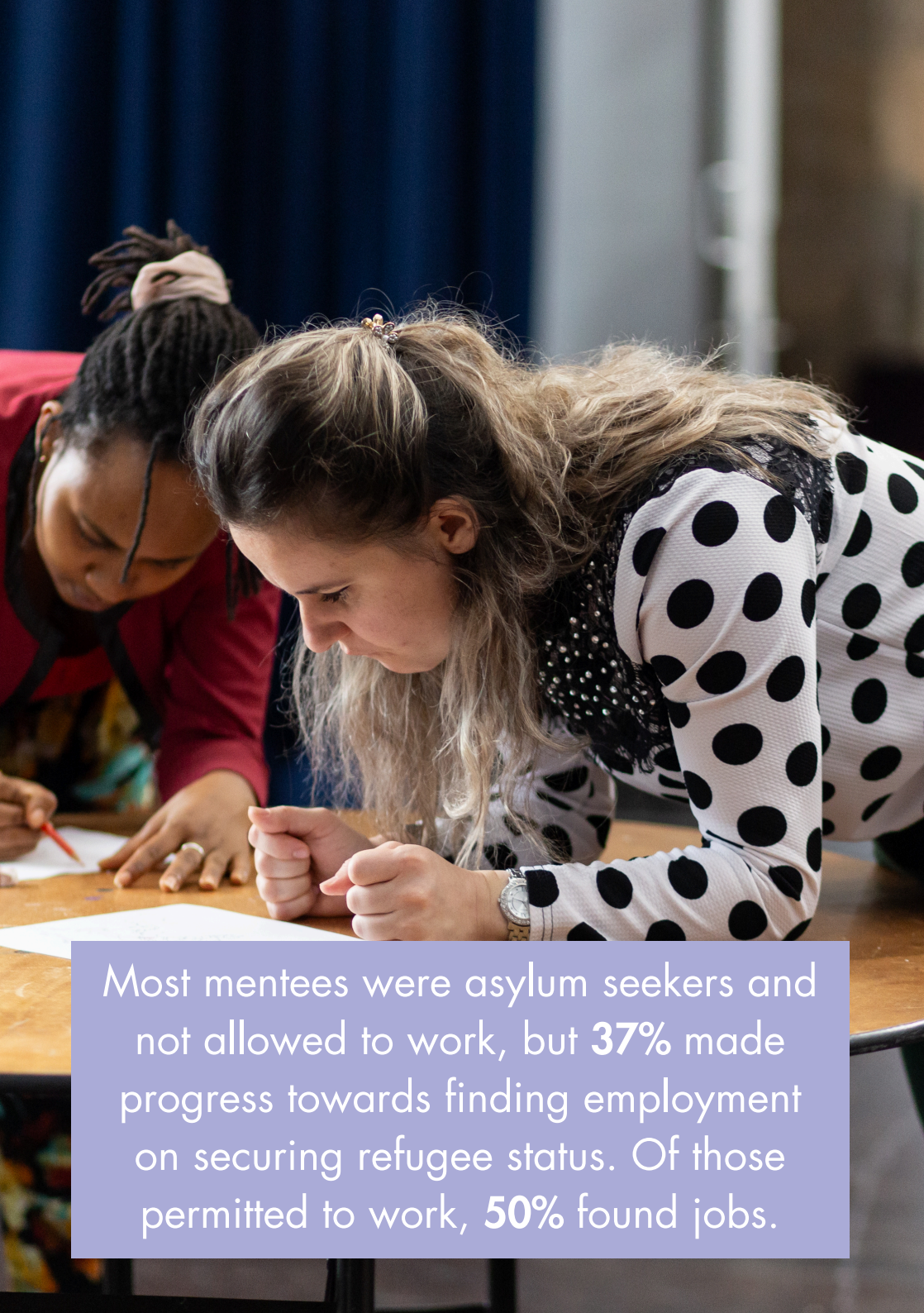
This year we expanded our food provision to benefit around **150** members and their families each week.

Mentoring Project

Our mentors play a vital role in empowering refugees and asylum seekers to navigate their own paths and regain control over their lives. Through one-on-one support and guidance, they help our members rebuild confidence, develop skills, and chart a course toward independence and fulfilment.

The Mentoring Project offers tailored support by matching members with trained volunteer mentors who guide them on their journey toward personal growth and autonomy. Mentors assist mentees in various areas including navigating the asylum system, improving mental health, and integrating into the local community. Each mentee receives support that is uniquely suited to their individual goals and challenges.

In 2023-24, the project continued to grow, with 54 mentors supporting 68 mentees over a 6-9 month period. This ongoing mentorship provided vital emotional and practical assistance, allowing mentees to set and achieve personal goals like accessing education, finding employment, or improving housing situations. Through regular contact, mentors help mentees gain a sense of stability, self-worth, and direction during a critical time in their lives.



Most mentees were asylum seekers and not allowed to work, but **37%** made progress towards finding employment on securing refugee status. Of those permitted to work, **50%** found jobs.



Case Study

"The mentor, she was nice, she was helping me with a lot of things. Like practice the language, English language, she was supporting me like with driving theory a lot. She was helping with the exam online every day. She was helping me with court for my benefits. She gift me confidence about myself, I have trauma, you know. She gifted me a lot of confidence in myself. She said over and over again: you can do it, you can do it, you can do it! Try, try and try! She made me feel happy and comfortable. She was very kind and never missed a meeting. She would send me a text message in the morning to remind me and ask me how I am feeling on the day of our meeting. She always confirmed before. And I always said, 'I will come!'.

The court listened to my case, before they don't care, one year and a half. Pushing with mentor and with my lawyer was successful. They made the decision, finally, finally. And it was successful.

She was giving me more confidence in myself. In first day we met, I couldn't speak like that. She told me you can speak, you can write, you can do. She pushed me and gave me more confidence.

When I have appointments, she supported me to get help I need. She sent GP letter. To the theory test, so that they gave me extra hours. The mentor said that I needed the support, and they accepted. She supported me a lot my side.

I did not confidence then but I do now. Now I feel who I am. Before I could feel the trauma, 'you don't know the language, you can't say things'. Now I have confidence. Now I can make appointments with my GP by myself.

Thank you is not enough, but thank you so much to all of you."

56%

of mentees said they achieved all their goals

44%

said they partially achieved their goals

97%

improved their English

52%

went into education or training

25%

made progress with their housing issues

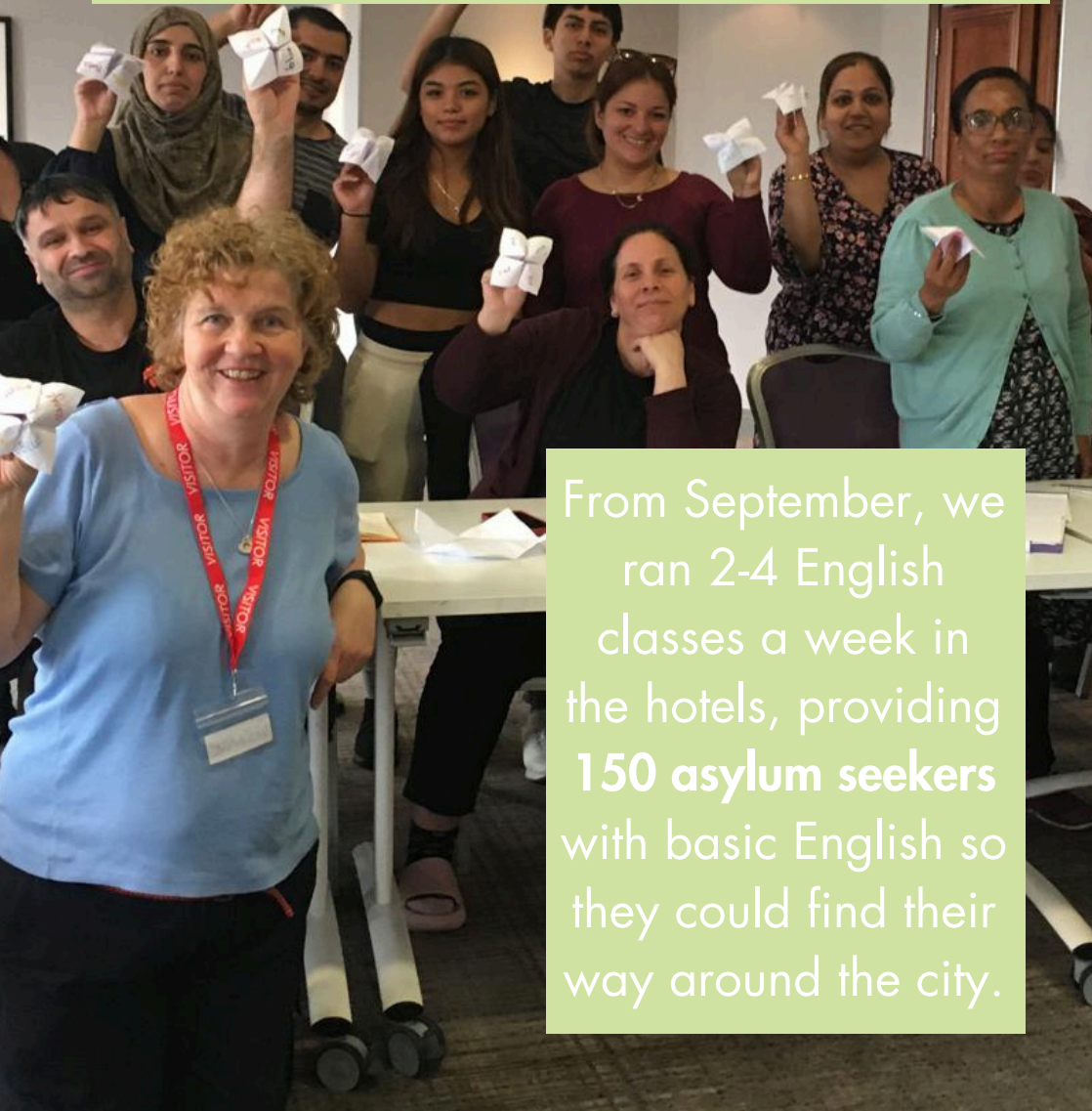
Learning Project

Teaching English is not just about language acquisition; it's about breaking down barriers, fostering integration, and providing a pathway to independence. English becomes more than words; it's a bridge to understanding, communication, and self-sufficiency.

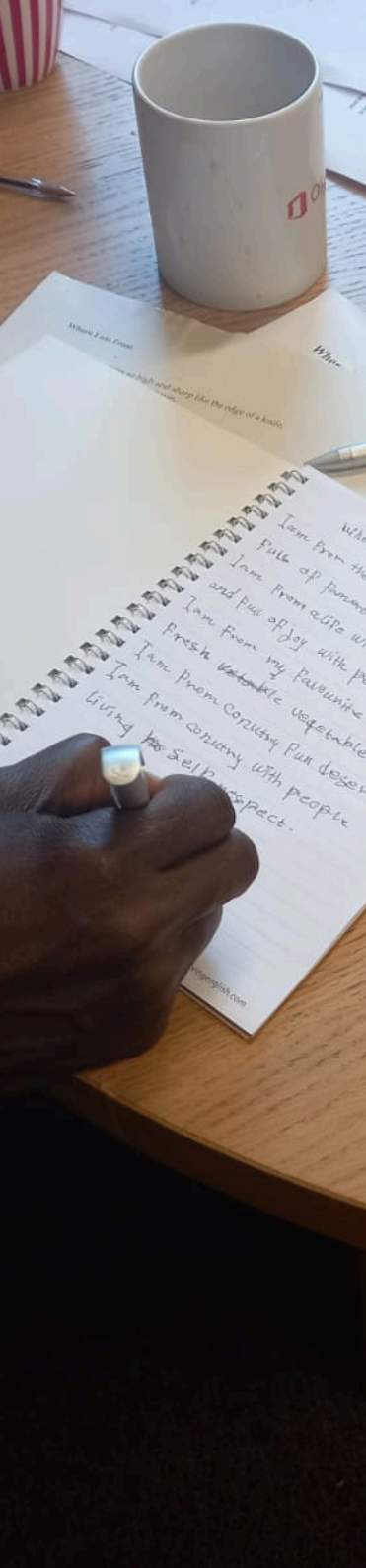
Throughout the past year, our Learning Project has experienced remarkable growth, particularly following the opening of two new asylum hotels in Bristol early last year. The influx of new members highlighted a pressing need for basic English language skills to navigate Bristol effectively. In response, and with the invaluable support of our dedicated English volunteers, we launched a pilot ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program within the hotels.

Despite encountering some challenges, such as securing suitable classroom spaces, this initiative is now fully operational and poised to continue into 2024. We've witnessed a doubling of our student intake, from approximately 80 per week to 160, underscoring the remarkable dedication and compassion of our teaching volunteers, without this expansion wouldn't be possible.

We provided nine English classes per week in our Welcome Centre, **empowering 306 asylum seekers and refugees** to navigate a new culture, make friends, access opportunities and feel a sense of belonging in a new city.



From September, we ran 2-4 English classes a week in the hotels, providing **150 asylum seekers** with basic English so they could find their way around the city.



As well as English classes, we offered the following learning opportunities for our members:

Weekly poetry classes

in partnership with The Reader, allowing **45 members** to explore different writers and ideas while improving their English vocabulary and oral skills.

12 theatre workshops

for women and two 'sharings' facilitated by a theatre practitioner, enabling **29 women** to develop theatre skills and use drama to explore issues important to them, practise their English and form connections.

Maths classes

in collaboration with CURO, equipping **26 members** with skills to progress in their studies and professional lives.

A discussion group called 'Sharing Stories'

in which **13 members** shared examples of their own culture such as music, festivals or recipes, enabling participants to celebrate their experiences and learn from others.

"Borderlands is like a family. It doesn't feel like students and teachers but everyone together. I remember this from the first time that I came here."

-anonymous feedback from the learning project.

Feel Good Wednesday

Our wellbeing project blossomed this year, supporting 140 members with weekly 'feel good' activities including:

- Sleep and Relaxation sessions facilitated by the Hope: Asylum Seekers and Refugees Trauma Service.
- A weekly Sewing group through Bridges for Communities Stitch Together programme, enabling women to create beautiful textile-based art, practise English, make friends and gain confidence.
- Weekly yoga and fitness classes, both taught by members.
- A new cooking group where women cook together and share nutritious snacks, providing a sense of freedom and independence that is taken away in the asylum system.
- New member-led initiatives including a nail bar, a dance class and a barber.





The project also expanded out of Wednesdays with three partnerships including:

- Weekly football working with St. Paul's Community Sports Academy, with the goal of establishing a Borderlands team to compete in an upcoming community cup.
- Climbing classes in collaboration with the Mothership Gym, to enjoy learning new skills and feel a sense of accomplishment.
- A partnership with Easton Leisure Centre offering our members free access to the gym, pool and some exercise classes.





Outreach Work

We expanded our outreach efforts this year, working with Bristol Mind to run a weekly drop-in service for asylum seekers in two central Bristol hotels and one hotel on the outskirts of the city, supporting 725 individuals and families.

Our model was to first ensure residents' basic needs were met, including phones and sim cards (with free data and calls), clothing and healthcare. We then helped people to meet their social and wider needs including referrals into language classes and volunteering, educational opportunities, mental health support, leisure activities and navigating the city (including accessing bikes).

We let people know about our Welcome Centre and other support services in the sector and helped those being moved to different cities to find support services there.

We attended regular interagency meetings and created a good working relationship with hotel management to ensure residents were supported and received the most up-to-date information and had their concerns raised.

Giving our members a voice

One of Borderlands' key objectives is to raise awareness and advocate for refugees and asylum seekers, ensuring their voices are heard on national, regional, and local levels. Through our work with partners like the Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP) and Bristol City of Sanctuary, we actively engage in social media campaigns and events.

In addition to advocacy through traditional and social media, Borderlands provides opportunities for members to develop their public speaking skills. Together with our partners, we like to offer members a space to share their personal stories at events, meetings, and in the media.

Their voices play a critical role in raising awareness of the challenges faced by people seeking safety in the UK, ensuring that the conversation is led by those with lived experience.

In 2023-24 Borderlands has also given interviews on both TV and radio to highlight the impact of harmful policies, while continuing to advocate for a fair and compassionate asylum system. These efforts are central to our mission of empowering our members and helping to shape a more welcoming society.



Our Volunteers

A team of 139 volunteers played a major role delivering our work this year, over a third of whom were asylum seekers and refugees. We pride ourselves in providing thorough training, supervision and support for our volunteer team.

At Borderlands, we actively encourage our members to volunteer with us, as it offers valuable opportunities for personal growth and integration. In 2023-24, 82 of our members took on volunteer roles within our community, allowing them to build friendships, develop skills, and gain confidence. Volunteering helped members feel a sense of belonging, as they contributed to the same support network that had once welcomed them. It also fostered deeper connections within the local community, offering members practical experience while enhancing their self-esteem and future prospects. Through volunteering, members not only supported Borderlands' vital work but also empowered themselves to create positive, lasting change in their own lives.

A team of
139
volunteers

the equivalent to
185
hours a week

86%
said they feel very much
part of Borderlands
community

86%
felt more confident
speaking English and
had learnt new skills

71%
felt very confident
suggesting new
activities and giving
their opinion

Case Study

K, an asylum seeker volunteering in our social supermarket, expressed interest in gaining work experience as a chef, so we signposted him to a 12-week intensive cooking training with Migrateful. K was accepted on to the programme where he learnt how to manage a team in a busy kitchen environment and completed his Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate. He is now using his new skills volunteering as a chef at Borderlands and sharing his knowledge with our kitchen volunteers, and has qualifications and experience to carry into a career in the restaurant industry upon receiving refugee status.



Member Participation

We strive for Borderlands to be led by our members as much as possible, and most of the activities in our Welcome Centre last year were delivered by a team of member-volunteers. Our Welcome and Members Participation Officer (WAMPO) – a refugee herself - led our Welcome Desk alongside a team of member-volunteers. This meant the first interaction new members had with Borderlands was with a person with lived experience, helping to give them confidence and a feeling of ownership over the space. We consulted with our members in the following ways:

Quarterly member-volunteer team meetings to discuss how we are delivering activities and suggest improvements.

Our WAMPO worked with women attending wellbeing activities on Wednesdays to gather feedback and suggestions.

A focus group with members interested in being peer mentors, to explore how to best meet the needs of new arrivals and training, resources and support needed.

A consultation on how to improve our social supermarket to best meet members' needs and ensure fair distribution of food.

A members survey and member-volunteers survey, both of which elicited suggestions for new activities, changes and improvements.

Our Partners

Collaboration is central to Borderlands' work. In 2023-24, we partnered closely with others to meet the changing needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Bristol. As part of the Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP), we strengthened the sector through peer support, co-production, and sharing best practices, enabling a stronger collective voice in advocacy and policy-making.

Our partnerships involve joint consultations, common needs assessments, and co-developed activities to address key challenges. By combining expertise and resources, we ensure that our services are aligned with sector goals.

Beyond BRASP, we actively participate in forums such as the Bristol Refugee Forum and the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Wellbeing Forum, allowing us to better connect with the community, influence policy, and support our members more effectively.



Our Impact

These stats are from our annual members survey held in December 2023



89%

of our members said they feel a part of Borderlands community and have made more friends

76%

said Borderlands has helped them feel more supported.

51%

feel a lot more confident since becoming a Borderlands member

25%

said Borderlands has helped them to feel more in control and independent

Case Study

When M started coming to Borderlands, she was shy, socially isolated and lacking in confidence. She had limited English and struggled to connect with others. Initially M started accessing our social supermarket and weekly hot meal, which alleviated her hardship and allowed her to make new friends and gain confidence. She made a friend from Turkey who helped her with English and accessing other services in Bristol. M then became a Borderlands volunteer and started to take ownership of the space, welcoming new members and gaining new skills. She was also referred into the Mentoring Project to work on her personal goals.

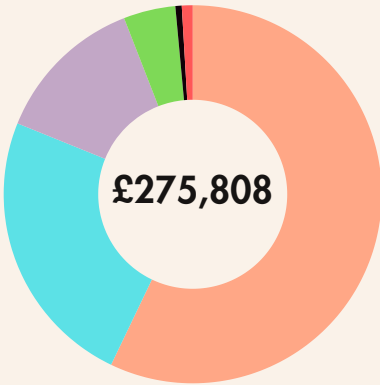
Within a year, M had taken up additional opportunities at Borderlands which had a significant impact on her wellbeing. She attended weekly yoga and sewing classes, and gained the confidence to join our English classes and poetry group which she quickly excelled in. One teacher said: "She is incredibly articulate, despite not yet having a strong command of English, about the isolation, fear and sadness she has suffered, but... so ready and determined to find hope and positivity." For M the journey was not a quick one but through our services she grew from a quiet, shy person with few social connections to someone who is fully engaged with their community.



Our finances

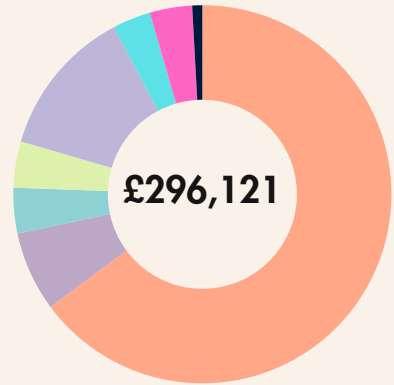
Our Accounts for 2023-24 show income of £275,808 and expenditure of £296,121. The deficit of £20,313 was mostly covered by restricted funds brought forward from the previous year. Expenditure increased by 8% from 2022-23 owing to staff pay rises, higher food costs and increased staff hours.

Our Income



Grants (restricted) £157,506
Grants (unrestricted) £66,224
Individuals £35,764
Charitable activities £12,264
Investments £2,556
Gift aid £1,494

Our Expenditure



Staff costs £192,013
Premises costs £20,190
Admin Costs £11,530
Consultancy £11,712
Project delivery Costs £37,741
Depreciation £9,656
Accountancy £10,732
Insurance £2,547

Our Funders

We would like to thank all our funders this year, including the Henry Smith Charity, Albert Gubay Foundation, Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, John James Bristol Foundation, Postcode Local Trust, The Household Support Fund, Medlock Trust, Nisbet Trust and others, including those who prefer to be anonymous.

We are also most grateful to the individuals, local businesses, social enterprises and charities who have made donations and supplied us with food for our hot meals and social supermarket.

Support us

We rely on our supporters and donors to transform the lives of our members. You can support us in a variety of ways:

- **Make a one-off donation**
- **Volunteer with us**
- **Set up a monthly donation**
- **Fundraise for us**



LET'S STAY IN TOUCH



WARMTH SHARING DIGNITY RESPECT FOR EVERYONE

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